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10/049,188

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EXAMINER

CANTELMO, GREGG

ART UNIT

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PAPER

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Office Action Summary | Application No. 10/049,188 | Applicant(s) YOSHIDA ET AL. | |
| | Examiner Gregg Cantelmo | Art Unit 1795 | |

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 10/18/07 & 9/18/07.
- 2a) ☐ This action is FINAL. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1, 17-22 and 27-30 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1, 17-22 and 27-30 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413) Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____ |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application |
| 3) <input type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08) Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____ | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

DETAILED ACTION

Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114

1. A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on October 18, 2007 has been entered.

Response to Amendment

2. In response to the amendment received September 18, 2007 which has been entered as per the RCE filed October 18, 2007:

- a. Claims 1, 17-22 and 27-30 are pending;
- b. The 112 rejection is withdrawn in light of the arguments;
- c. The prior art rejections are withdrawn upon further consideration.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102

The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

3. Claims 1, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 27 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by JP 07-230811A (JP '811).

This rejection relies upon the IPDL machine translation of JP 07-230811, a copy of which has been made of record.

JP '811 discloses a membrane electrode assembly, a fuel cell having the membrane electrode assembly and method of making both.

As to the fuel cell of claim 1 and the membrane electrode assembly of claims 17, 21 and 22, JP '811 discloses electrodes each having a catalyst layer and a gas diffusion layer (abstract and paragraphs 7-13). Each of the catalyst/gas diffusion configurations are applied to a solid polymer electrolyte mold or membrane (paragraph 18). Given the full disclosure of JP '811 one of ordinary skill in the art would have understood the invention of this prior art reference to result a fuel cell structure having the solid polymer electrolyte mold sandwiched by opposing electrodes wherein each electrode includes the gas diffusion layer and catalyst layer as described in JP '811 and with the catalyst layers interposed between the gas diffusion layers and the electrolyte mold. The gas diffusion layers of JP '811 include polytetrafluoroethylene resin (e.g. a water repellant resin as described in the abstract and in paragraphs 2 and 7-12) and graphite whiskers (abstract and paragraphs 7-12). The graphite whiskers have a length of 30-60 micrometers (paragraphs 13 and 20) which falls within the claimed length and has a fiber filament diameter of 0.3-0.6 micrometers or 300-600 nanometers. The lower limit of 300 nanometers is a specific data point that is identical to the end point of the instant claims and since the specific data points are identical, are anticipatory for this limit. The gas diffusion layer is in intimate contact with the catalyst layer formed thereon as would have been readily understood by one of ordinary skill in the art. The mixture

of the PTFE to carbon whiskers is from 5-40% by weight, preferably 10-30% by weight (see paragraph 10) such weight relationships inherently fall in the broadly claimed range of 1-95% mass as required in claim 22).

Regarding the heat treatment of at least 2000°C:

It appears that the heat treatment of the instant application fabricates a graphite structure (see page 21, lines 2-10 of the instant application). While the prior art reference does not impart this same heat treatment process step, the fibrous carbon of JP '811 is clearly described as being graphitic (as discussed above). Thus the prior art product is held to be the same as that of the instant claims, absent clear evidence to the contrary.

"[E]ven though product-by-process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process." In re Thorpe, 777 F.2d 695, 698, 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (citations omitted).

"The Patent Office bears a lesser burden of proof in making out a case of prima facie obviousness for product-by-process claims because of their peculiar nature" than when a product is claimed in the conventional fashion. In re Fessmann, 489 F.2d 742, 744, 180 USPQ 324, 326 (CCPA 1974). Once the Examiner provides a rationale tending to show that the claimed product appears to be the same or similar to that of the prior art, although produced by a different process, the burden shifts to applicant to

come forward with evidence establishing an unobvious difference between the claimed product and the prior art product. In re Marosi, 710 F.2d 798, 802, 218 USPQ 289, 292 (Fed. Cir. 1983). Ex parte Gray, 10 USPQ2d 1922 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1989). See MPEP section 2113.

The catalyst material is a mixture of platinum group catalyst and a carbon black support (see paragraph 12). Thus the surface of the gas diffusion layer in contact with the platinum catalyst material is also in contact with the carbon black support (as applied to claims 18 and 21).

The hydrophobic resin is PTFE, a fluorine-based resin (as discussed above and applied to claim 27).

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

The factual inquiries set forth in *Graham v. John Deere Co.*, 383 U.S. 1, 148 USPQ 459 (1966), that are applied for establishing a background for determining obviousness under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) are summarized as follows:

1. Determining the scope and contents of the prior art.
2. Ascertaining the differences between the prior art and the claims at issue.
3. Resolving the level of ordinary skill in the pertinent art.
4. Considering objective evidence present in the application indicating obviousness or nonobviousness.

This application currently names joint inventors. In considering patentability of the claims under 35 U.S.C. 103(a), the examiner presumes that the subject matter of the various claims was commonly owned at the time any inventions covered therein were made absent any evidence to the contrary. Applicant is advised of the obligation under 37 CFR 1.56 to point out the inventor and invention dates of each claim that was not commonly owned at the time a later invention was made in order for the examiner to consider the applicability of 35 U.S.C. 103(c) and potential 35 U.S.C. 102(e), (f) or (g) prior art under 35 U.S.C. 103(a).

4. Claims 1, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 27 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP '811.

In the alternative, as applied to the claimed range of 100-300nm and the prior art disclosed range of 300-600nm. While 300nm is anticipatory of the claimed range, the differences between the two claimed ranges is overall held to be slight differences which are obvious over one another as will be explained at the end of this alternative rejection.

This rejection relies upon the IPDL machine translation of JP 07-230811, a copy of which has been made of record.

JP '811 discloses a membrane electrode assembly, a fuel cell having the membrane electrode assembly and method of making both.

As to the fuel cell of claim 1 and the membrane electrode assembly of claims 17 and 21, JP '811 discloses electrodes each having a catalyst layer and a gas diffusion layer (abstract and paragraphs 7-13). Each of the catalyst/gas diffusion configurations

are applied to a solid polymer electrolyte mold or membrane (paragraph 18). Given the full disclosure of JP '811 one of ordinary skill in the art would have understood the invention of this prior art reference to result a fuel cell structure having the solid polymer electrolyte mold sandwiched by opposing electrodes wherein each electrode includes the gas diffusion layer and catalyst layer as described in JP '811 and with the catalyst layers interposed between the gas diffusion layers and the electrolyte mold. The gas diffusion layers of JP '811 include polytetrafluoroethylene resin (e.g. a water repellant resin as described in the abstract and in paragraphs 2 and 7-12) and graphite whiskers (abstract and paragraphs 7-12). The graphite whiskers have a length of 30-60 micrometers (paragraphs 13 and 20) which falls within the claimed length and has a fiber filament diameter of 0.3-0.6 micrometers or 300-600 nanometers.

Regarding the heat treatment of at least 2000°C:

It appears that the heat treatment of the instant application fabricates a graphite structure (see page 21, lines 2-10 of the instant application). While the prior art reference does not impart this same heat treatment process step, the fibrous carbon of JP '811 is clearly described as being graphitic (as discussed above). Thus the prior art product is held to be the same as that of the instant claims, absent clear evidence to the contrary.

"[E]ven though product-by-process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is

unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process.” In re Thorpe, 777 F.2d 695, 698, 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (citations omitted).

“The Patent Office bears a lesser burden of proof in making out a case of prima facie obviousness for product-by-process claims because of their peculiar nature” than when a product is claimed in the conventional fashion. In re Fessmann, 489 F.2d 742, 744, 180 USPQ 324, 326 (CCPA 1974). Once the Examiner provides a rationale tending to show that the claimed product appears to be the same or similar to that of the prior art, although produced by a different process, the burden shifts to applicant to come forward with evidence establishing an unobvious difference between the claimed product and the prior art product. In re Marosi, 710 F.2d 798, 802, 218 USPQ 289, 292 (Fed. Cir. 1983). Ex parte Gray, 10 USPQ2d 1922 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1989). See MPEP section 2113.

The catalyst material is a mixture of platinum group catalyst and a carbon black support (see paragraph 12). Thus the surface of the gas diffusion layer in contact with the platinum catalyst material is also in contact with the carbon black support (as applied to claims 18 and 21).

The difference between the claims and JP '811 is the scope of the claimed diameter range (100nm-300nm in the claims compared to 300nm-600nm in JP 811).

A review of the full disclosure of the instant application reveals that acceptable diameters are from 500nm or less (see page 19, ll. 11-22). Thus there is no apparent critical or patentable distinction for the claimed diameter range of 100-300 from diameter values as compared to diameters of up to 500nm. With this understanding,

the prior art teachings in JP '811 exhibit a significant overlap with the overall recognized acceptable fiber diameters and there is no evidence of critical and unexpected results associated with the particular claimed range compared to values up to about 500nm.

Therefore the prior art teaching of fiber diameters from 300-600nm are held to be slightly different from the claimed range of 100-300nm but appreciated as acceptable diameters. Generally, differences in ranges will not support the patentability of subject matter encompassed by the prior art unless there is evidence indicating such ranges is critical. In re Boesch, 617 F.2d 272, 205 USPQ 215 (CCPA 1980). In re Aller, 220 F.2d 454, 456, 105 USPQ 233, 235 (CCPA 1955). In re Hoeschele, 406 F.2d 1403, 160 USPQ 809 (CCPA 1969). It has been held that when the difference between a claimed invention and the prior art is the range or value of a particular variable, then a prima facie rejection is properly established when the difference in the range or value is minor. Titanium Metals Corp. of Am. v. Banner, 778 F.2d 775, 783, 227 USPQ 773, 779 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

5. Claims 19 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over each JP '811 rejection above as applied to claims 17 and 18 above, and further in view of U.S. patent No. 5,861,222 (Fischer).

The difference not yet discussed is of the spaces arrangements of claims 19-20.

Fischer discloses of a gas diffusion layer comprising a bimodal pore distribution and wherein the total porosity of more than 40% to less than 75% is composed of small pores with an average diameter of up to 0.5 microns and large pores with an average diameter of 1 to 20 microns.

The motivation for providing the porosity of Fischer to the gas diffusion layer of EP '638 is that it enhances the diffusive characteristics of the gas diffusion layer while maintaining adequate mechanical strength to the layer.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of JP '811 by providing the porosity of Fischer to the gas diffusion layer of JP '811 since it would have enhanced the diffusive characteristics of the gas diffusion layer while maintained adequate mechanical strength to the layer.

6. Claim 29 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP '811 in view of the admitted prior art relied upon in the instant application, notably Fig. 1.

This rejection relies upon the IPDL machine translation of JP 07-230811, a copy of which has been made of record.

JP '811 discloses a membrane electrode assembly, a fuel cell having the membrane electrode assembly and method of making both.

As to the fuel cell of claim 29, JP '811 discloses electrodes each having a catalyst layer and a gas diffusion layer (abstract and paragraphs 7-13). Each of the catalyst/gas diffusion configurations are applied to a solid polymer electrolyte mold or membrane (paragraph 18). Given the full disclosure of JP '811 one of ordinary skill in the art would have understood the invention of this prior art reference to result a fuel cell structure having the solid polymer electrolyte mold sandwiched by opposing electrodes wherein each electrode includes the gas diffusion layer and catalyst layer as described in JP '811 and with the catalyst layers interposed between the gas diffusion layers and

the electrolyte mold. The gas diffusion layers of JP '811 include polytetrafluoroethylene resin (e.g. a water repellant resin as described in the abstract and in paragraphs 2 and 7-12) and graphite whiskers (abstract and paragraphs 7-12).

Regarding the heat treatment of at least 2000°C:

It appears that the heat treatment of the instant application fabricates a graphite structure (see page 21, lines 2-10 of the instant application). While the prior art reference does not impart this same heat treatment process step, the fibrous carbon of JP '811 is clearly described as being graphitic (as discussed above). Thus the prior art product is held to be the same as that of the instant claims, absent clear evidence to the contrary.

"[E]ven though product-by-process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process." In re Thorpe, 777 F.2d 695, 698, 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (citations omitted).

"The Patent Office bears a lesser burden of proof in making out a case of prima facie obviousness for product-by-process claims because of their peculiar nature" than when a product is claimed in the conventional fashion. In re Fessmann, 489 F.2d 742, 744, 180 USPQ 324, 326 (CCPA 1974). Once the Examiner provides a rationale tending to show that the claimed product appears to be the same or similar to that of the prior art, although produced by a different process, the burden shifts to applicant to

come forward with evidence establishing an unobvious difference between the claimed product and the prior art product. In re Marosi, 710 F.2d 798, 802, 218 USPQ 289, 292 (Fed. Cir. 1983). Ex parte Gray, 10 USPQ2d 1922 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1989). See MPEP section 2113.

Regarding the diameter of the carbon fibers:

The graphite whiskers have a length of 30-60 micrometers (paragraphs 13 and 20) which falls within the claimed length and has a fiber filament diameter of 0.3-0.6 micrometers or 300-600 nanometers. The lower limit of 300 nanometers is a specific data point that is identical to the end point of the instant claims and since the specific data points are identical, and thus clearly obviate the claimed range. The gas diffusion layer is in intimate contact with the catalyst layer formed thereon as would have been readily understood by one of ordinary skill in the art.

In the alternative, as applied to the claimed range of 100-300nm and the prior art disclosed range of 300-600nm. While 300nm is anticipatory of the claimed range, the differences between the two claimed ranges is overall held to be slight differences which are obvious over one another.

A review of the full disclosure of the instant application reveals that acceptable diameters are from 500nm or less (see page 19, ll. 11-22). Thus there is no apparent critical or patentable distinction for the claimed diameter range of 100-300 from diameter values as compared to diameters of up to 500nm. With this understanding, the prior art teachings in JP '811 exhibit a significant overlap with the overall recognized

Art Unit: 1795

acceptable fiber diameters and there is no evidence of critical and unexpected results associated with the particular claimed range compared to values up to about 500nm.

Therefore the prior art teaching of fiber diameters from 300-600nm are held to be slightly different from the claimed range of 100-300nm but appreciated as acceptable diameters. Generally, differences in ranges will not support the patentability of subject matter encompassed by the prior art unless there is evidence indicating such ranges is critical. In re Boesch, 617 F.2d 272, 205 USPQ 215 (CCPA 1980). In re Aller, 220 F.2d 454, 456, 105 USPQ 233, 235 (CCPA 1955). In re Hoeschele, 406 F.2d 1403, 160 USPQ 809 (CCPA 1969). It has been held that when the difference between a claimed invention and the prior art is the range or value of a particular variable, then a prima facie rejection is properly established when the difference in the range or value is minor. Titanium Metals Corp. of Am. v. Banner, 778 F.2d 775, 783, 227 USPQ 773, 779 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

The difference between the claimed invention and JP '811 is that JP '811 does not appear to clearly disclose of providing separators to sandwich the assembly (claim 29).

Admitted prior art Fig. 1 shows a typical fuel cell configuration wherein a solid electrolyte 4 is surrounded on each side by a catalyst layer, gas diffusion layer and separator plates each set of layers sandwiching the interior layers such that the separator plates 1 sandwich the electrode/electrolyte/electrode layers within (as applied to claim 29).

One of ordinary skill in the art would have found it obvious to employ the separator plates of Admitted prior art Fig. 1 to the fuel cell of JP '811 since it would have provided both the means to flow reactant to the gas diffusion layers in an isolated fashion and form a single cell unit.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of JP '811 by employing the separator plates of Admitted prior art Fig. 1 since it would have provided both the means to flow reactant to the gas diffusion layers in an isolated fashion and form a single cell unit.

7. Claims 29 and 30 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP '811 in view of U.S. Patent No 6,329,092 (Maeda).

This rejection relies upon the IPDL machine translation of JP 07-230811, a copy of which has been made of record.

JP '811 discloses a membrane electrode assembly, a fuel cell having the membrane electrode assembly and method of making both.

As to the fuel cell of claims 29-30, JP '811 discloses electrodes each having a catalyst layer and a gas diffusion layer (abstract and paragraphs 7-13). Each of the catalyst/gas diffusion configurations are applied to a solid polymer electrolyte mold or membrane (paragraph 18). Given the full disclosure of JP '811 one of ordinary skill in the art would have understood the invention of this prior art reference to result a fuel cell structure having the solid polymer electrolyte mold sandwiched by opposing electrodes wherein each electrode includes the gas diffusion layer and catalyst layer as described

in JP '811 and with the catalyst layers interposed between the gas diffusion layers and the electrolyte mold. The gas diffusion layers of JP '811 include polytetrafluoroethylene resin (e.g. a water repellant resin as described in the abstract and in paragraphs 2 and 7-12) and graphite whiskers (abstract and paragraphs 7-12). The graphite whiskers have a length of 30-60 micrometers (paragraphs 13 and 20) which falls within the claimed length and has a fiber filament diameter of 0.3-0.6 micrometers or 300-600 nanometers. The lower limit of 300 nanometers is a specific data point that is identical to the end point of the instant claims and since the specific data points are identical, are anticipatory for this limit. The gas diffusion layer is in intimate contact with the catalyst layer formed thereon as would have been readily understood by one of ordinary skill in the art.

Regarding the heat treatment of at least 2000°C:

It appears that the heat treatment of the instant application fabricates a graphite structure (see page 21, lines 2-10 of the instant application). While the prior art reference does not impart this same heat treatment process step, the fibrous carbon of JP '811 is clearly described as being graphitic (as discussed above). Thus the prior art product is held to be the same as that of the instant claims, absent clear evidence to the contrary.

"[E]ven though product-by-process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is

unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process.” In re Thorpe, 777 F.2d 695, 698, 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (citations omitted).

“The Patent Office bears a lesser burden of proof in making out a case of prima facie obviousness for product-by-process claims because of their peculiar nature” than when a product is claimed in the conventional fashion. In re Fessmann, 489 F.2d 742, 744, 180 USPQ 324, 326 (CCPA 1974). Once the Examiner provides a rationale tending to show that the claimed product appears to be the same or similar to that of the prior art, although produced by a different process, the burden shifts to applicant to come forward with evidence establishing an unobvious difference between the claimed product and the prior art product. In re Marosi, 710 F.2d 798, 802, 218 USPQ 289, 292 (Fed. Cir. 1983). Ex parte Gray, 10 USPQ2d 1922 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1989). See MPEP section 2113.

Regarding the diameter of the carbon fibers:

The graphite whiskers have a length of 30-60 micrometers (paragraphs 13 and 20) which falls within the claimed length and has a fiber filament diameter of 0.3-0.6 micrometers or 300-600 nanometers. The lower limit of 300 nanometers is a specific data point that is identical to the end point of the instant claims and since the specific data points are identical, and thus clearly obviate the claimed range. The gas diffusion layer is in intimate contact with the catalyst layer formed thereon as would have been readily understood by one of ordinary skill in the art.

In the alternative, as applied to the claimed range of 100-300nm and the prior art disclosed range of 300-600nm. While 300nm is anticipatory of the claimed range, the

Art Unit: 1795

differences between the two claimed ranges is overall held to be slight differences which are obvious over one another.

A review of the full disclosure of the instant application reveals that acceptable diameters are from 500nm or less (see page 19, ll. 11-22). Thus there is no apparent critical or patentable distinction for the claimed diameter range of 100-300 from diameter values as compared to diameters of up to 500nm. With this understanding, the prior art teachings in JP '811 exhibit a significant overlap with the overall recognized acceptable fiber diameters and there is no evidence of critical and unexpected results associated with the particular claimed range compared to values up to about 500nm.

Therefore the prior art teaching of fiber diameters from 300-600nm are held to be slightly different from the claimed range of 100-300nm but appreciated as acceptable diameters. Generally, differences in ranges will not support the patentability of subject matter encompassed by the prior art unless there is evidence indicating such ranges is critical. In re Boesch, 617 F.2d 272, 205 USPQ 215 (CCPA 1980). In re Aller, 220 F.2d 454, 456, 105 USPQ 233, 235 (CCPA 1955). In re Hoeschele, 406 F.2d 1403, 160 USPQ 809 (CCPA 1969). It has been held that when the difference between a claimed invention and the prior art is the range or value of a particular variable, then a prima facie rejection is properly established when the difference in the range or value is minor. Titanium Metals Corp. of Am. v. Banner, 778 F.2d 775, 783, 227 USPQ 773, 779 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

The differences between the claimed invention and JP '811 is that JP '811 does not appear to clearly disclose of providing separators to sandwich the assembly (claim 29) and further apparently fails to teach of a fuel battery comprising at least two fuel cells layered together (claim 30).

Fig. 1 of Maeda shows a typical fuel cell configuration wherein a solid electrolyte is surrounded on each side by a catalyst layer, gas diffusion layer and separator plates 8/9 each set of layers sandwiching the interior layers such that the separator plates 8/9 sandwich the electrode/electrolyte/electrode layers within (as applied to claim 29).

One of ordinary skill in the art would have found it obvious to employ the separator plates of Maeda to the fuel cell of JP '811 since it would have provided both the means to flow reactant to the gas diffusion layers in an isolated fashion and form a single cell unit.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of JP '811 by employing the separator plates of Maeda since it would have provided both the means to flow reactant to the gas diffusion layers in an isolated fashion and form a single cell unit.

Each individual cell is then employed in a cell stack as shown in Fig. 2. Such stacks are known in the art so as to provide a power source of a desired voltage.

The motivation for stacking at least two cells on top of one another, as shown by Maeda is that it increases the voltage of the stack particular to the load requirement of the system connected to the fuel cell. Thus stacking cells obviously increases the voltage output of the fuel cell power source.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of JP '811 by stacking at least two cells on top of one another, as shown by Maeda, since it would have increased the voltage of the stack particular to the load requirement of the system connected to the fuel cell. Thus stacking cells would have obviously increased the voltage output of the fuel cell power source.

8. Claim 28 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 07-296818 (JP '818) in view of JP '811.

This rejection relies upon the IPDL machine translations of JP 07-296818 and JP 07-230811, copies of which has been made of record.

JP '818 discloses a method of producing a layer assembly for a fuel cell comprising applying a first layer 1 onto a porous conductive substrate wherein the first layer comprises PTFE and conductive particles (abstract, figures and paragraphs 3 and 8-10) and forming a second layer comprising catalyst bearing carbon particles (abstract, figures and paragraphs 14 and 15). According to JP '818 the first layer includes both a conductive particle as well as a microfilament such as a graphite whisker or carbon fiber (paragraph 8). Thus the first layer of JP '818 include embodiments that have PTFE, conductive particles and graphite whiskers or carbon fibers (as applied to claim 28).

The differences between claim 28 and JP '818 are that JP '818 does not teach of the particulars of the claimed fibrous carbon.

JP '811 teaches of using graphite nanofibers as a conductive material in a gas diffusion layer as discussed above, incorporated herein.

The motivation for using the graphite fibers of JP '811 as a specific conductive material in a gas diffusion layer or coating applied to a gas diffusion substrate is that it provides a gas diffusion layer having improved gas flow properties, mechanical properties and favorable conductive performance.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of JP '818 by using the graphite fibers of JP '811 as a specific conductive material in a gas diffusion layer or coating applied to a gas diffusion substrate since it would have provided a gas diffusion layer having improved gas flow properties, mechanical properties and favorable conductive performance.

Regarding the heat treatment of at least 2000°C:

It appears that the heat treatment of the instant application fabricates a graphite structure (see page 21, lines 2-10 of the instant application). While the prior art references do not impart this same heat treatment process step, the fibrous carbon of JP '818 can be graphite and more particular the conductive material of JP '811 is clearly described as being graphitic (as discussed above). Thus the prior art product is held to be the same as that of the instant claims, absent clear evidence to the contrary.

"[E]ven though product-by-process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is

unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process.” In re Thorpe, 777 F.2d 695, 698, 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (citations omitted).

“The Patent Office bears a lesser burden of proof in making out a case of prima facie obviousness for product-by-process claims because of their peculiar nature” than when a product is claimed in the conventional fashion. In re Fessmann, 489 F.2d 742, 744, 180 USPQ 324, 326 (CCPA 1974). Once the Examiner provides a rationale tending to show that the claimed product appears to be the same or similar to that of the prior art, although produced by a different process, the burden shifts to applicant to come forward with evidence establishing an unobvious difference between the claimed product and the prior art product. In re Marosi, 710 F.2d 798, 802, 218 USPQ 289, 292 (Fed. Cir. 1983). Ex parte Gray, 10 USPQ2d 1922 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1989). See MPEP section 2113.

Regarding the diameter of the carbon fibers:

The graphite whiskers have a length of 30-60 micrometers (paragraphs 13 and 20) which falls within the claimed length and has a fiber filament diameter of 0.3-0.6 micrometers or 300-600 nanometers. The lower limit of 300 nanometers is a specific data point that is identical to the end point of the instant claims and since the specific data points are identical, clearly obviate the claimed range. The gas diffusion layer is in intimate contact with the catalyst layer formed thereon as would have been readily understood by one of ordinary skill in the art.

In the alternative, as applied to the claimed range of 100-300nm and the prior art disclosed range of 300-600nm. While 300nm is anticipatory of the claimed range, the

Art Unit: 1795

differences between the two claimed ranges is overall held to be slight differences which are obvious over one another.

A review of the full disclosure of the instant application reveals that acceptable diameters are from 500nm or less (see page 19, ll. 11-22). Thus there is no apparent critical or patentable distinction for the claimed diameter range of 100-300 from diameter values as compared to diameters of up to 500nm. With this understanding, the prior art teachings in JP '811 exhibit a significant overlap with the overall recognized acceptable fiber diameters and there is no evidence of critical and unexpected results associated with the particular claimed range compared to values up to about 500nm.

Therefore the prior art teaching of fiber diameters from 300-600nm are held to be slightly different from the claimed range of 100-300nm but appreciated as acceptable diameters. Generally, differences in ranges will not support the patentability of subject matter encompassed by the prior art unless there is evidence indicating such ranges is critical. In re Boesch, 617 F.2d 272, 205 USPQ 215 (CCPA 1980). In re Aller, 220 F.2d 454, 456, 105 USPQ 233, 235 (CCPA 1955). In re Hoeschele, 406 F.2d 1403, 160 USPQ 809 (CCPA 1969). It has been held that when the difference between a claimed invention and the prior art is the range or value of a particular variable, then a prima facie rejection is properly established when the difference in the range or value is minor. Titanium Metals Corp. of Am. v. Banner, 778 F.2d 775, 783, 227 USPQ 773, 779 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

Response to Arguments

9. Applicant's arguments have been considered but are moot in view of the new ground(s) of rejection.

However it is important to note that Applicants arguments are not entirely persuasive.

Regarding the argument that the fibrous carbon of the present invention is substantially free of platinum and thus different from the structure of Masuko, such arguments are not persuasive since the claims fail to recite any such limitation.

In response to applicant's argument that the references fail to show certain features of applicant's invention, it is noted that the features upon which applicant relies (i.e., that the VGCF in the gas diffusion layer is "substantially free" of platinum) are not recited in the rejected claim(s). Although the claims are interpreted in light of the specification, limitations from the specification are not read into the claims. See *In re Van Geuns*, 988 F.2d 1181, 26 USPQ2d 1057 (Fed. Cir. 1993).

Regarding Applicants attempt to disqualify the Masuko reference:

Applicant's statement to disqualify Masuko is not presented in a proper format. Disqualification of 102(e) references must be presented in the form of an appropriate affidavit or declaration in accordance 37 CFR 1.131.

Regarding the inapplicability of WO 2001/092151.

Applicants note that the newly cited U.S. Patent 6,789,388 to Masuko et al (assumed to be U.S. Patent No. 6,780,388) corresponds to WO 2001/092151, a copy of which is attached, which was published on December 6, 2001. The present application claims benefit from U.S. Provisional Application 60/308,855, filed on August 1, 2001,

which is before the publication date of WO 2001/092151. Applicants submit that the present claims are entitled to a filing date of August 1, 2001 and that WO 2001/092151, therefore, cannot be used as a reference against the present claims.

The Examiner fails to understand the reasoning of such argument. It is apparent that none of the rejections of record rely on the WO document above and hence WO 2001/092151 is not used as a reference against the present claims. U.S. Patent No. 6,780,388 may correspond to foreign patent and patent publications but the effective filing date of this U.S. Patent is May 31, 2001 and further to a provisional application date of November 6, 2007. In so far as the rejection of record is presented, U.S. Patent No. 6,780,388 clearly has earlier effective filing dates over the instant application and can be applicable as a reference against the present claims.

Conclusion

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Gregg Cantelmo whose telephone number is 571-272-1283. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday to Thursday, 8:30-6:30.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Pat Ryan can be reached on 571-272-1292. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Art Unit: 1795

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregg Cantelmo", with a stylized flourish at the end.

gc

December 12, 2007

Gregg Cantelmo
Primary Examiner
Art Unit 1795